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Beecher's Indianapolis Church

THIS building, which stood until recent years on the northwest corner of Circle and Market streets, Indianapolis, was the last of the earlier church buildings of the city. In its latter days it was given over to diverse and secular uses, the varied small industries in its dingy cubby-hole rooms sharing the partitioned interior with an art school and a school of music. To the younger generation it was familiarly known as "Circle Hall," and most of the heedless multitude did not know that the old relic had been intimately identified with the pastorate of the most brilliant and famous preacher connected with the history of the town—that for seven years those venerable walls had echoed to the ringing messages of the most eloquent of modern divines.

Henry Ward Beecher came to Indianapolis from Lawrenceburg in 1839, in response to the call of a newly-formed congregation that had withdrawn from the First Presbyterian church of this city.* The young pastor preached in the county seminary for something more than a year, or until the new church built a home for itself. This was the building we are speaking of, which, on October 4, 1840, was dedicated as the Second Presbyterian church of Indianapolis. Here Mr. Beecher preached until September of 1847, when he removed to Brooklyn, N. Y.

According to a newspaper sketch written when the building was razed, the cost of the church and ground was \$10,000. The church was built by Ephriam Colestock for \$8,800—a structure of some pretensions at that day, when the population of the city numbered only 2,692. It is described as having, originally, lofty pillars in the front and a cupola—features that were removed when it ceased to be a church.

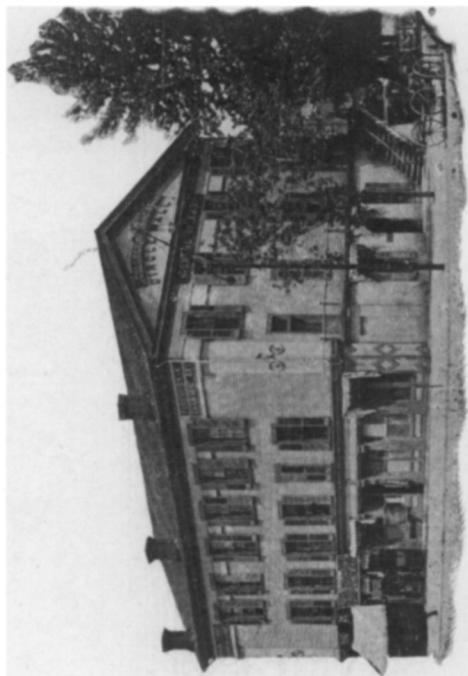
After Mr. Beecher's day the pulpit was occupied by the following pastors: The Rev. Clement E. Babb, May 7, 1848 until January 1, 1853; the Rev. Thornton A. Mills, January 1, 1854 until February 9, 1857; the Rev. George P. Tindall, August 6, 1857 until September 27, 1863; the Rev. Hanford A. Edson, January 17, 1864 until removal, in 1867.

*The founders of the Second Presbyterian church, fifteen in number, are given as Bethuel F. Morris, Daniel Yandes, Luke Munsell, Lawrence M. Vance, Mary J. Vance, Sidney Bates, William Eckert, Alexander H. Davidson, Robert Mitchell, J. F. Holt, M. R. Holt, John L. Ketcham, Jane Ketcham, Wm. S. Hubbard and Catherine Merrill.

After the removal of the church to its new edifice on the corner of Vermont and Pennsylvania streets the old building was used for the housing of the city's high school, then in its first days, and it thus served for about three years, or until the new high school building was erected on Pennsylvania street.

Mr. William S. Hubbard, one of the first members of Mr. Beecher's congregation gives the following reminiscences of the famous pastor and the old church. "I was one of the organizers of the church," he says, "and I boarded with Mr. Beecher in 1840, when he lived in a one-story brick cottage at the southeast corner of New York and Pennsylvania streets, the site afterward known as Governor Morton's residence. More than that, in the early days of the church, I lived next door to it, and carried the key to the belfry, for there was a bell in the old pepper-box steeple, which was not only rung to call people to church, but to sound the alarm of fire. That was in the days of the volunteer fire department, and the Marion engine company, of which I was a member, had its engine-house, within the Circle, across from the church. During the Morgan raid, persons came to my house to get the keys to ring the old bell and alarm the citizens as to the approaching raiders, but it was then badly cracked, and it was not rung. I remember the baptism of Gen. T. A. Morris. It was in 1842, and took place in White river. Several others were baptized at the time, and Mr. Beecher gave choice of three modes—immersion, sprinkling or pouring."

The late Simon Yandes said of Beecher: "He was admirably adapted to western life, entering into all the social life and engagements of the little town. He had a special talent for conversation, was full of wit and fun, and always had his faculties in immediate command. It was but a little while after his coming until he knew everybody here. It is greatly to be doubted if he improved in his oratorical style when he became older—he was probably at his best here in Indianapolis. My recollection is that among his varied accomplishments he included that of being a good shot with the rifle.



HENRY WARD BEECHER'S INDIANAPOLIS CHURCH. RAZED 1897. See p. 210